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EC1535 Common Stalk Borer

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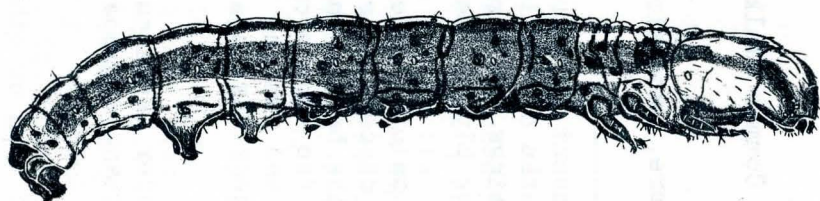
Bare, O. S., "EC1535 Common Stalk Borer" (1945). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 2646.
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Common Stalk Borer



Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics
University of Nebraska College of Agriculture, and the United States
Department of Agriculture cooperating, W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln.

Common Stalk Borer*

by
O. S. Bare, Extension Entomologist

Description. The adult insect is a brownish gray moth that much resembles several of the common cutworm moths or "millers." It has a wing expanse of approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches and the front wings are marked by a wavy white cross line about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the distance from the wing tip to the body.

The larva or "borer" is a smooth bodied caterpillar that when mature is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. In color it is chocolate or purplish brown with a white stripe extending the entire length of the back. On each side is a broken white stripe, extending from the head about $\frac{1}{4}$ the length of the body, interrupted for $\frac{1}{4}$ the body length, and then starting again and running to the rear tip of the body. When nearly mature the borer loses these markings and becomes of a solid grayish white color.

Host plants. The stalk borer feeds on or in a wide variety of plants but seems to work most commonly in giant ragweed, corn, tomato, wheat, timothy and brome grass.

Type of injury. Stalks of corn or other plants attacked by this borer may show irregular rows of holes in the unfolding leaves.. The larvae bore into the plants a few inches from the ground and travel upward, eating out the heart and causing the upper part to become ragged and deformed, or wilt and die. At times they may be found in any part of the plant from the root to the tassel or flower. In corn, injury is most severe in a few rows along the edges of the field adjacent to where weeds had grown in the previous year. If the entire field had been weedy, damage may be scattered similarly through it.

Life history. Winter is passed only in the egg stage and on coarse stemmed grasses and weeds such as giant ragweed. The eggs normally hatch in May and the young larvae bore into plants such as wheat, brome and timothy. Later they migrate to coarser stemmed plants such as corn, tomato and giant ragweed. They become fully grown in late summer and pupate in a brown case, usually in the soil, but occasionally in their tunnels in the host plant. The moths emerge in September and lay their eggs on coarse grasses and weeds.

Control. Control measures are mainly preventive. Since this insect winters only in the egg state, and on weeds and grasses around the fields, burning of such weeds and grasses in the fall or early spring is an effective control measure. Plowing under such material in the fall also is effective and early spring plowing may be of value. Keeping down weeds in and around the cornfield during the growing season prevents future damage as it deprives the moths of suitable material on which to lay their eggs. Spraying or dusting infested plants with chemicals is useless.

* *Papaipema nebris* Guenee